

Basic Emphases in Missionary Training

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In introducing Dr. E. Stanley Jones to an audience in India, the Hindu chairman remarked: "Our speaker has no significance apart from the cause which he represents." This remark is certainly apropos to the situation here today. The person who stands before you now can claim no significance apart from the great cause which he represents. The real significance of this hour lies not in the installation of a new professor, but in the inauguration of a new department at Asbury Theological Seminary, namely, a department of Christian Missions. It is, therefore, a high hour because it is a high cause.

From its very beginning, Asbury Theological Seminary has always had a great missionary passion. This is evidenced by the fact that out of a total of 1,361 graduates thus far, there are one hundred eighty alumni who are laboring for the Master in forty-two foreign countries around the world. This is slightly more than thirteen per cent of the entire alumni. Further proof is the generous contributions made to foreign missions each year by members of the student-body and faculty through the very active organization of the Missionary Prayer Band. Such contributions amount to approximately six thousand dollars each academic year, and are in addition to donations made by individual members to their local church missionary program.

In view of all this it may seem strange for Asbury Theological Seminary to have made no provision in the past for regular courses on missions. This, however, has been the case. Apart from one or two lecture courses on missions, given off and on by guest professors, the Seminary has had no definite program of preparation for prospective missionaries among its student body. This has constituted a serious lack in the curriculum of the Seminary, and has been a source of concern to the administration for the past several years.

With the opening of a new department of Christian Missions, Asbury Theological Seminary is taking an important step forward. In the future she will be better equipped to give proper

direction to the missionary concern which is already prevalent on the campus, and to give more adequate preparation to those who have received a definite call for service overseas.

Evangelizing the world and building the Church are herculean tasks. Nothing less than the best in personnel and in preparation can suffice. Asbury Theological Seminary must now more fully assume its share of the responsibility in training young men and women for the missionary outreach of the Christian Church.

ADVANTAGES OF ASBURY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

The atmosphere that pervades the life of Asbury Theological Seminary provides special advantages in the recruiting and training of missionaries.

In the first place, the distinct evangelical emphasis provides fertile soil for the production and recruitment of missionaries. There is sufficient cumulative evidence on hand to prove that evangelical Christianity is far more conducive to the missionary spirit than is so-called "liberal" Christianity, for it provides more fully both the motivation and the message necessary for Christian missions. In an editorial entitled, "Seventy-Nine Young People," which appeared in the January 30, 1952, issue of the *Zion's Herald*, the editor made the following observation:

Last week at the conclusion of the meetings of the Board of Missions and Church Extension of the Methodist Church, we saw 79 young people commissioned as Missionaries and deaconesses.... Looking through the list it was clear that a significant number of these people had their training in conservative schools. Asbury College had trained more of these people than any other school, and we found ourselves wondering about this. Does it mean that the so-called 'liberal' schools are not missionary minded? Does it mean that the trend of missions will be basically conservative?

The editor raised the question without giving an answer. But is not the answer self-evident? Liberalism just does not produce as many missionaries as evangelicalism. With the evangelical emphasis at Asbury Theological Seminary there is a strong stress upon the world-wide mission of the Christian Church, so that we can always expect a substantial number of

our students will accept the challenge to dedicate themselves to missionary service. This should in itself help to develop a strong department of Christian Missions.

In the second place, the interdenominational nature of the student-body and faculty provides a wholesome atmosphere for the training of prospective missionaries. The new program of missionary training that is being advocated these days emphasizes the fact that "the present world scene and the needs of the younger churches would dictate that missionaries going out today should have at least part of their training in an ecumenical setting. Their preparation for mission should include some prayerful struggle with the divisions of the Church as well as some serious searching for roads to reconciliation."¹ With its student-body representing twenty-four, and its faculty representing eight different denominations, Asbury Theological Seminary provides an excellent training ground for prospective missionaries. Here Methodists, Free Methodists, Wesleyan Methodists, Evangelical United Brethren, Presbyterians, Friends, Nazarenes, and members of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, the Pilgrim Holiness Church, The Salvation Army, and various other denominations bring together their varied and rich heritages to form an unusual interdenominational setting where students may develop an ecumenical outlook and the spirit of understanding, co-operation and brotherly love--all so essential for an effective presentation of the Christian message to non-Christians in other lands.

In the third place, the international and inter-racial character of the student-body provides an excellent atmosphere for the training of missionaries. The new trend in missionary training also stresses the need to make use of nationals of other countries to assist in this preparation. This may be done, it is suggested, either through inviting such nationals to speak on the history, culture and life of their own countries, or through less formal contacts with students from overseas in the same institution or in neighboring institutions. The situation at Asbury Theological Seminary fulfills this need admirably. Here on our campus twenty-eight students from eight different foreign countries come together, bringing a delightful touch of their long history and rich culture, to afford

¹*International Review of Missions*, July 1960, p. 289.

an unusual international setting. Here Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Philippino, and Indian mingle with American (Negro and white), Canadian and Irish. Here the prospective missionary can learn to enjoy curry and rice, and sukiyaki, even before he arrives on the field. By informal conversation he can learn something of the customs, religions, politics, and outlook on life of each of the foreign countries represented. He can learn to mingle with foreigners, make friends with them, and love them. This is, indeed, a decided advantage for our department of Christian Missions.

EMPHASES IN TRAINING

The Willingen meeting of the International Missionary Council, held in 1952, emphasized that missionary training includes three definite stages: preliminary training before sailing for the field, training on the field during the first term of service, and training during the first furlough. Since the first stage takes place, for the most part, in the theological seminary, the seminary holds a very important place in this over-all program of missionary training. It is in this initial stage that the main spiritual foundations are laid, basic attitudes are formed, and essential skills are developed. This preliminary training helps the new missionary start off on the right foot when he arrives on the field.

As to the type of training that is needed in this preliminary stage, much valuable material has been written on the subject in recent years. These writings deal with some very pertinent aspects of the "new look" in Christian missions, and provides some very helpful direction for an adequate program of missionary training to meet the needs of the day. These suggestions should be studied and applied most carefully by all institutions engaged in the training of missionaries. Here, we shall endeavor to make use of all these studies and suggestions in the formation of an adequate curriculum for our new department of Christian Missions.

In this brief paper I shall not attempt to present a survey of all the literature on this subject, nor a full-fledged program for our department. I shall confine myself to what, I firmly believe, are three basic aspects of missionary preparation that need greater emphasis and a more adequate place in any missionary training program for this modern day.

In a paper prepared by the Secretary of the Committee on Missionary Personnel of the Division of Foreign Missions, of the National Council of Churches of Christ, entitled "New Trends in Missionary Training in the United States," the writer makes the following comment:

The academic institutions established in the past as missionary training institutions have not, in general, made sufficiently radical changes in curricula to prepare candidates for new situations. A number of mission board secretaries feel that such institutions have not emphasized sufficiently the spiritual development of candidates, the understanding of today's world and above all, the communication of the Gospel.²

Note these three points: the spiritual development of candidates, the understanding of today's world, and the communication of the Gospel. Here are the three basic aspects that demand greater emphasis and more careful consideration in the missionary training program of our present day.

What can we do at Asbury Theological Seminary to provide an adequate training for our missionary candidates in these three important areas of preparation?

1. *The spiritual development of candidates.* In an address given by A. Jack Dain at the Evangelical Foreign Mission Executives Retreat, at Winona Lake in October, 1956, he said that the primary cause for failure among missionaries on the field is that of spiritual immaturity. Evidences of such immaturity, he suggested, are "the lack of a true missionary call, a lack of true discipline in daily living, a lack of true holiness, a lack of true humility, and finally a lack of true compassion."

The first aim of our missionary training program, then, must be to develop in the prospective missionary the kind of person who will be acceptable to God and useful to the Church overseas. The Gospel is commended primarily by the person, with a clear sense of call, with deep-going roots in motivation, fully committed to God and His will, and spiritually prepared to "endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." He must be a person whose life demonstrates that he is a good steward of all of life, must possess true humility, have a

²Published in 1957, pp. 14, 15.

compassion for those in need, and have a sincere and burning desire to serve the Lord. Whatever other qualifications may be required, these are certainly the essential minimum.

Another spiritual requirement for missionary service that needs special emphasis is the fullness of the Holy Spirit with its accompanying enduement with power from on high. Christ gave two post-resurrection orders: "Go ye" and "Tarry ye." These are not contradictory, but complementary. It is worthy of note that in four of the five statements of the Great Commission, some reference to the Holy Spirit, direct or implied, is made. This fact is significant. Christian missions and Pentecost are inseparably related, Pentecost being the essential preparation for missions, and missions being the logical and inevitable result of Pentecost. This relation is true not only historically, but experientially as well. That is to say, not only could Christian missions not *begin* until the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost, but also they cannot *continue* in any real way without the continuing presence and power of the Spirit in the hearts and activities of missionaries in this twentieth century. The Holy Spirit is the Originator, Promoter, and Director of Christian missions.

Dr. E. Stanley Jones, one of the outstanding missionaries of our day, testifies in his splendid book, *The Christ of Every Road*:

I came to India with this conviction, and the years have done nothing but verify it. It is this. Pentecost is not a spiritual luxury, it is an utter necessity for human living. The human spirit fails unless the Holy Spirit fills. We are shut up to the alternative-- Pentecost or failure.

In keeping with one of its major objectives, namely, to send forth a Spirit-filled ministry, Asbury Theological Seminary must send forth *Spirit-filled missionaries* by emphasizing the need for each student to tarry for "the promise of the Father" until he "be endued with power from on high." This emphasis will not only *produce* missionaries on our campus, but will also *equip* them for effective service on the foreign field. Without such an emphasis we shall fail in our duty to God, to our students, and to the Church overseas.

At the Willingen meeting of the International Missionary Council, delegates of the younger churches issued a joint statement which read:

There are frequent reports among us of missionaries coming to the younger churches with little or no evangelistic passion. We hesitate to pass sweeping judgments; but we feel that the younger churches require missionaries who go forth to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ and not those who sit at administrator's desks.³

Our aim at Asbury Theological Seminary will be to produce evangelistic, Spirit-filled missionaries. By this we do not mean that we will attempt to produce only evangelists. We shall most certainly seek to encourage every branch of missionary service. (Even at the present time we have among our prospective missionaries an engineer, an agriculturist, and a physical-education director.) What we do mean is that regardless of the type of missionary work a student may be planning to do, we shall expect him to be an evangelistic agriculturist, an evangelistic engineer, or an evangelistic physical-education director, and so on. This is what makes the difference between the Point IV program of the Government and that of the Church.

Producing missionaries with such high spiritual qualifications cannot be the responsibility solely of the new department, for such qualifications are not the product of the lecture-hall or the classroom alone. Such qualifications cannot be *taught*; they must be *caught*--caught from a certain spirit that pervades the entire life of the Seminary, in the class-room, in the dormitories, in the chapel, and in the halls. The entire Seminary must maintain such a high spiritual level--through prayer, example, and dedication--that our prospective missionaries will *catch* this spirit and go forth to be wholehearted, committed, Spirit-filled men and women.

2. *The understanding of today's world.* A well-balanced program of missionary training will not only help the candidates to deepen the personal spiritual resources necessary to the fulfillment of their vocational objective, but will also help them gain that degree of theoretical knowledge and practical understanding requisite for their approach to the missionary task today.

The courses planned for missionaries in the past have covered a wide variety of subjects such as comparative

³"The Missionary Obligation of the Church," p. 40.

religion, area studies, linguistics, anthropology, agriculture and adult literacy. There has not been sufficient emphasis, however, upon what appears to be the major need today--the preparation of the young missionary for life in a revolutionary world. Many sweeping changes are taking place through the world today, not least in what we have been accustomed to call "the mission field." These changes are taking place in every area of human life: political, social, economic, and religious. Today's missionary must have an awareness about the kind of world in which we live. He must be able to read the signs of the times and interpret them wisely. He must have both accurate knowledge and balanced understanding of current affairs which impinge with increasing force and relevance upon the life of the people among whom he works.

Some of the main forces that the new missionary has to contend with today are: 1) the spirit of *nationalism*, which expresses itself in a strong aspiration for freedom from foreign domination, and also a sincere desire for nation-building; 2) the new *cultural renaissance*, which expresses itself in a re-discovery of one's ancient heritage, along with the rejection of the idea of western cultural superiority; 3) the *resurgence of the ethnic religions*, which are no longer dormant and silent, but are now aggressive and vocal; 4) the *political unrest* and uncertainty in many parts of the world, that makes long-range planning in missionary work most difficult, and often leads to the withdrawal of missionary personnel; 5) the *ideological struggle* between democracy and totalitarianism, with Communism seeking to annihilate all religion, and in turn making itself a religion; 6) the coming of age of the "younger churches" abroad, with a new emphasis on the "indigenous church," and the concept of "one world, one mission." The missionary of today must understand these various forces, must be able to distinguish between granite and rubble, and must learn to harness useful forces to the building of the Church of Christ throughout the world.

The missionary training program of today must prepare young Christians to withstand victoriously the first shocks of service abroad in a revolutionary age. Every missionary candidate must be helped to understand some of the common assumptions about the American way of life, and the challenge to these assumptions by people of almost every other nation. It is, of course, impossible to prepare people *fully* for the

situations they will meet when they begin their service overseas. Nevertheless, much can be done through careful instruction and wise counsel to soften the blows which sensitive and idealistic young Americans will inevitably receive when they leave their homeland. It is only natural, and right, that young Americans should be proud of their nationality and heritage. At the same time, the challenge to their ideas and their assumptions, and some expressed resentment of their high standard of living, will demand a good supply of patience and grace.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the new missionary training in this area is that of *developing right attitudes* in the minds of the prospective missionaries. This is even more important than giving useful information and developing needed techniques. The "set of the mind" will either make or break the missionary of today. Such attitudes as that of racial and cultural superiority, spiritual pride, intolerance, impatience, and paternalism can ruin the effectiveness of the servant of God. He must go forth in the Spirit of Christ,

Not to administer, but to minister.

Not to dominate, but to cooperate.

Not to command, but to counsel.

Not merely to teach, but also to learn.

Not as master, but as servant.

Not as patron, but as friend.

His motto must ever be: "He (Christ) must increase, but I must decrease." "They (the nationals) must increase, but I must decrease."

3. *The communication of the Gospel.* The Gospel involves communication because it is essential News--and Good News at that! News cannot be kept secret; it must be told.

Thus the missionary is essentially a man with a message. His objective is to present that message so intelligently and effectively that men, under the illumination of the Holy Spirit, will be persuaded to accept the truth of that message and to acknowledge Jesus Christ as personal Saviour and Lord.

It must be admitted that the Christian missionary has not been overly successful in communicating this message to the peoples of the world. The Church has made relatively minor forays into the ranks of the non-Christian religions, however impressive these forays may be. In a total population of 1,541,814,000 in Asia only 50,022,658 are Christians, and

even in Africa's population of 233,975,000 there are only about 32,974,111 Christians.⁴

These inroads of the Christian faith into the other religions have been made by an offensive Church against defensive religions. Henceforth the Church has to meet a counter-offensive by the other religions. Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam were inactive and decadent during the past great missionary century (1840-1940). Today these religions are in a state of revival, adapting themselves radically to the modern world, exhibiting new vitality, and fired by a sense of mission. No contemporary devotee of any one of these older faiths is willing to admit that his faith is in any sense preliminary and should eventually give way to Christianity. He loudly challenges the Christian's claim to exclusive truth and grace in the Gospel. In fact, he now argues that it is Christianity that is decadent and that neo-Hinduism, or neo-Buddhism, or Islam as the case may be, is "the religion of the day." As Dr. Edmund Soper says, "The real encounter with the ethnic faiths is still to be made."

How is the Christian missionary of today to meet the challenge of these revived faiths?

In the first place, he himself must have a more thorough understanding of the Christian faith. He must be convinced of, and wholly committed to, this faith. In the paper prepared by the Division of Foreign Missions of the NCCC (already referred to), the Secretary makes the rather disturbing observation that "present day candidates are sincere, but too many are religiously illiterate...they know surprisingly little about the Bible. This is true, not only of medical, agricultural and educational missionaries, but also of many Seminary graduates."⁵ It is self-evident that unless the missionary knows, and understands, and believes in his message, he certainly will not be able to effectively communicate it to others.

In the second place, the Christian missionary of today must have a more thorough knowledge of the resurgent ethnic religions than seemed necessary a few decades ago. This represents a first-class intellectual task and prolonged study and application. In Latin America the encounter with Roman

⁴*Brittanica Book of the Year*, 1959.

⁵*New Trends in Missionary Training*, 1957, pp. 1, 2.

Catholicism lays down a similar challenge and requires a similar special preparation. Such a study must not be made with a motive similar to that which prompts the commander of an invading army to study carefully the nature of the country before him--in order that he may conquer it the more quickly and effectively. But such a study should be made with a motive similar to that of the highway surveyor who studies the terrain to be traversed--in order to understand the difficulties he will encounter. Such a study must be made in an attitude of sincere humility with a view to a sympathetic understanding of the genuine difficulties that the non-Christians may have in comprehending the truth of the Christian Gospel. The missionary must keep constantly in mind that he is a living human being among other living human beings, whose minds are soaked in the atmosphere of their own religions. Thus it is impossible to approach them without a thorough knowledge of their religion and general human background. With such a knowledge he can present the Christian truth in terms and modes of expression that make its challenge intelligible and related to the peculiar quality of reality in which they live.

Thirdly, the Christian missionary, if he is to achieve effective communication, must learn to adapt his message to the cultural patterns of the people. What is involved here is not the altering of the essential content of the Biblical message, but the encasing of this message in a culturally relevant verbal form. To fail to do this often discredits the message in the minds of the receptors. For instance, to conclude a soul-stirring narration of the parable of the Prodigal Son to a Hindu audience with a description of killing of the fatted calf certainly ruins the whole effect of this wonderful story. The substitution of a description of an Indian feast with Indian delicacies would bring the story to a glorious climax. Again, to picture Jesus as standing and *knocking* at the door of the human heart would only discredit the Master in the minds of the Zanaki people of Tangaynika, for in their culture only thieves knock on doors; an honest man will come to a house and *call* the names of the people inside. To say that Jesus stands at the door and *calls* is far more meaningful to these people. Situations calling for this kind of adaptation can be multiplied endlessly.

Fitting the content of our Gospel into such culturally meaningful forms as will be fit vehicles for the communication of

the message will bring a far greater response in the hearts and minds of the people. For example, the truth of the atonement in Christ can be emphasized in a variety of ways in accordance with the cultural patterns of the people. In a culture where the idea of "mediation" is strong, where no one approaches an official except through a "middle man" or a number of "middle men," the presentation of Christ as the one true Mediator between God and man would help the people to understand more fully the atoning work of the Redeemer. In a culture where the practice of sacrifices is prevalent, the presentation of the death of Christ as the final and perfect sacrifice, as "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world," would have far greater meaning for the receptors. Among the Tobas in Argentina, where the entire social structure is built upon the practice of sharing their possessions with one another, the missionary message which appealed to them was that of "sharing." God was described as sharing His Son with mankind, and His Son as sharing His life and His Spirit with mankind. All people then who share in this common gift of God give evidence that they belong to the tribe of God; they are all His children, and as such they must share with one another in this new fellowship of the faith.

Finally, in this area of communication, mastery of the language of the people will be of the utmost importance. This will enable the missionary to communicate his message in the thought-patterns, the idioms, and the proverbs of the people. Without a knowledge of the language there will be serious discrepancies between the "encoding" of words on the part of the speaker and the "decoding" of those words on the part of the receptor. If a culture cannot and does not transmit its own concepts except by language, the missionary certainly cannot expect to inculcate wholly foreign concepts without using the only language which the people really understand. In his recent book, *Message and Mission*, Dr. Eugene Nida tells how in one area of South America missionary work has been going on for more than thirty years, with a total of slightly more than twenty different missionaries working in the area at different times. In all these years none of the missionaries has learned to speak the Indian language with any degree of intelligibility. In fact, only one missionary has made any marked effort to do so. The result has been that there are not more than sixteen Indians who are said to be "converted" and more than half of

these are regarded as having "backslidden." Mastery of the language of the people is certainly one of the most essential requisites for effective communication anywhere.

Our task here at Asbury Theological Seminary will be to help provide the skills that will enable our missionaries to be effective communicators of the truth in Christ. We must help our students to avoid two extremes: on the one hand, an *unintelligible piety*--having a gospel, but not knowing the language and culture of the people, so men will not be able to understand their message; and on the other hand, an *unreligious liberalism*--knowing the language and culture of the people perfectly, but having no gospel for them, so men will not be changed. *Truth with impact* must be our aim. Thus we must seek to give our students a clear and thorough understanding of the Christian faith, so that they will be grounded firmly in the Word of God. We must seek to give them a more thorough knowledge of the ethnic religions of the world, and develop in the students a spirit of humility, sympathy, and understanding in their attitude toward people of other faiths. We should aim to develop basic skills in learning a foreign language, and above all to implant a strong motivation for learning the language. We should introduce our students to the science of culture and develop skill in adapting the Christian message to the cultural environment in which they find themselves. To this end we should plan, as soon as it is possible, to incorporate into our curriculum courses in linguistics and cultural anthropology. We cannot expect, of course, to develop all these skills to their perfection here in the Seminary. These skills will have to be further developed and perfected out on the field itself, and in institutions of specialized training. But we can lay the foundation, give the basic knowledge, and develop the right attitudes necessary.

Here then are proposed three basic emphases in missionary training for these modern days: the spiritual development of candidates, the understanding of today's world, and the communication of the Gospel. With the help of God, Asbury Theological Seminary will seek to stress these major emphases and to hold them in proper balance and perspective.

The training of missionaries for this revolutionary age is a difficult and challenging task which demands from us the highest and best. We, therefore, here and now rededicate to God our minds, our talents, our strength, our all, with the

sincere prayer that He will grant to us the necessary wisdom and grace to faithfully complete the task to which He has called us.